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DEPARTMENT FOR INR
DHS FOR OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND VISA WAIVER PROGRAM
OFFICE/MARC FREY
VIENNA FOR DHS/ICE

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SUBJECT: SLOVAKIA'S BORDER WITH UKRAINE

CLASSIFIED BY: Susan M. Ball, Charge d'Affaires.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (U) Summary. On Monday, September 21, Embassy officers together with DHS/ICE attachi visited the Slovak-Ukraine border as the guests of the Border and Alien Police (BAP). Our purposes were (i) to assess any security changes since visa waiver accession; (ii) observe U.S.-donated inspection equipment in action; and (iii) discuss the GOS's continuing efforts to combat the smuggling of people, goods and money into and through Slovakia. End Summary.

Schengen's Eastern Frontier

¶2. (C) The Slovak border with Ukraine stretches 98 kilometers and has five official crossing points, three by road and two by rail. (Note: Readers wanting a detailed description of Slovak border security should see the (classified) Country Report of DHS's Visa Waiver Program Office dated September 2008, hereinafter "the DHS Report.") The border between official crossing points is known as the Green Border. The southern 35 or so kilometers of the Green Border, where the land is hilly but passable, is protected by a live-feed video camera chain with floodlights and infrared capability. The northern portion, more rugged and in places nearly impassable, is protected by watchtowers and physical patrols. Starting last week, the Slovaks began testing 3.5km of "virtual fence" along the southern stretch using their RALEN technology, on which more later, and they plan to install additional underground motion sensors. Eventually, they intend to install further electronic surveillance in the northern portion, including RALEN.

¶3. (C) Before visiting the border, Consul Simon Hankinson, DHS/ICE Attachi Jim Plitt (based in Vienna), and Pol-Mil officer Aaron Chase were given a preliminary briefing at the BAP headquarters in Sobrance, eastern Slovakia, by BAP Director Tibor MAKO and Sobrance Director Miroslav UCHNAR. The Sobrance facility monitors the camera chain along the southern Green Border and at official crossings. The BAP showed us video footage, day and night, of small groups of people crossing the frontier and of BAP response patrols intercepting them. The BAP uses cars, SUVs, ATVs, motorcycles, and snowmobiles to patrol and respond to alarms. They also have chartered helicopters on

call if needed, but no dedicated aerial surveillance and no unmanned aerial vehicles. The motorized equipment seemed in good shape, and it appeared they had enough of it to do their jobs. Officers seemed well-trained, and morale good.

¶4. (C) Interceptions at the Ukraine border by BAP patrols in 2009 were around 1000, which combined with the 1300 or so immigrants who fell out of legal status (as a result of overstay, for example) account for a total of 2300 illegally present foreigners counted by the Slovaks so far in 2009. In 2007, the number caught at the Ukraine border was 1,684, and the total number out of status was 6,761. Primary countries of origin of illegal entrants are Georgia, Moldova, and South Asian countries. The Slovaks have an agreement with the Ukrainians to repatriate anyone, regardless of origin, where it can be proven that they came into Slovakia from Ukraine. This is not always easy to prove, which is why they invest so heavily in video surveillance. Indeed, one video from June showed two entrants walking carefully backwards over the border, so as to give the impression they were crossing from Slovakia into the Ukraine and not the other way round.

¶5. (C) From Sobrance, we visited the Vysne Nemecke border crossing, the busiest vehicle crossing point between the countries. At peak times it can handle up to 150 trucks and many more cars, but this was a quiet day; one truck and a handful of cars were waiting to cross to one side or the other. The BAP showed us the U.S.-donated radiation detection scanners and Customs' x-ray hangar for cars and trucks. They then demonstrated the RALEN system, a privately-developed Slovak technology which detects humans through an electro-magnetic scan, on an 18-wheeler truck. The system control looks like two DVD-sized black boxes, with minimal switches, hooked up to a server and monitor. These are linked to a series of sensors outside that look like ceiling lights, maybe a foot wide and three long, suspended in a line high above the truck. (There is another RALEN system mounted under a rubber speed-bump mat which is used for buses. We did not see this in operation as no buses came through). Each sensor shows up on the monitor as one of five zones. The scan takes around 30 seconds, at the end of which each zone is either "alarm" or green (nothing detected). The system is apparently calibrated to go off only for humans, no other animal or object.

¶6. (C) We observed RALEN scan a truck containing a man in the passenger seat; the alarm went off in that zone. The man got off, the truck was re-scanned, and the monitors registered all clear. (For buses, they make all passengers get off before the scan). They told us that RALEN is passive, i.e. detection of existing phenomena rather than passing rays through the object like an x-ray scan. On the Green Border, the RALEN system uses towers, about 5 feet high and 30 meters apart, hooked up to a central monitor to detect passing humans. There is also a mobile unit which can be set up to cover an area just over a kilometer in length. The Slovaks are clearly proud of RALEN and keen to market it to other countries. Interior Minister Kalinak has personally visited the U.S. with RALEN executives to demonstrate the system and may be planning further visits to USG contacts.

¶7. (C) Finally, we visited Petrovce BAP station, where we were taken to see a watch-tower and then on to the actual border. This is a strip of land cut into the dense forest and brush, perhaps ten feet wide, with a Slovak pole (sort of a concrete Washington monument, about five feet high, painted in the national colors) facing a Ukrainian pole every 100 yards or so along the border. The Slovaks try to limit trails up to the actual border, to make it easier to detect new tracks. They showed us a popular place for cigarette smuggling (very profitable in the EU) and for our benefit, tripped up the hidden motion-detection alarm which summons BAP patrols when humans cross the border. The newly-built border station contained a small, secure holding facility for less than ten migrants, which was well-maintained. The BAP station officer said it was last used a few weeks ago.

Corruption

¶18. (C) In informal discussions during the trip, we pressed the BAP chief on the status of investigations and prosecution for official malfeasance. For example, we were told unofficially last year that Lubomir Janco, who was head of the MoI's Department of State Citizenship and Registers at least as recently as 2005, was under internal investigation for malfeasance, though no one at MOI has confirmed this officially.

We were also told that the naturalizations of over 100 people, many of them Chinese, were being reviewed in light of this and possibly other malfeasance accusations. Despite the "smoke," in nearly a year, there has been no "fire" in the form of charges or prosecutions.

¶19. (C) The BAP's internal controls unit is the Bureau for the Inspection Service of the Police Corps, reporting directly to the Minister of Interior. Uchnar said that some officers have been disciplined in the past, but could recall nothing new since the DHS Report came out. The DHS Report, based on a May 2008 visit, said that "Slovak colleagues ~ described a recent case where an officer from the Border Control Unit in Petrovce was believed to have been bribed by smugglers to allow the [entry of] contraband cigarettes from Ukraine. According to the Director of the BCU Petrovce [Uchnar or his predecessor], the officer suspected of corruption was immediately dismissed from the Border Police and was being prosecuted." However, more than a year later, there has been no public report of any such prosecution. We made the point that the occasional prosecution for malfeasance, which occurs in all countries and services, was more credible than a perfect record, which implies at best a reluctance to investigate charges and at worst a cover-up.

¶10. (U) Some smuggling of goods certainly does continue; for instance, in August, a scanner inspecting trains from Ukraine at one of the rail crossings was shut down for several weeks due to alleged concerns from Ukraine about the safety of workers. It was widely believed that the "smuggler mafia" was behind the closure. In late September, a few weeks after the scanners were turned back on, customs found 600 cartons of cigarettes hidden in a train car.

The Ones that Get Away~

¶11. (C) Mako was reluctant to estimate how many illegal migrants slip through the Green Border undetected. The Slovaks (rightly) believe that those migrants are heading elsewhere in the EU. They say that of intercepted aliens, they return about 80% to Ukraine under their agreement, 15% claim asylum and are processed according to the EU's Dublin accord, and the other 5% go to detention centers to establish where they are from so they can be sent home. However, aliens ordered removed may only be held in detention for a maximum of 180 days under EU rules. Therefore, in cases where identity cannot be established, such as migrants from places like Iraq, Afghanistan, or Pakistan, whose civil records and diplomatic representation are insufficient to identify their nationals, those who cannot be proven to have come in from the Ukraine are ultimately released.

¶12. (C) Released migrants probably work their way into "old Europe" to find work and meet up with ethnic networks from home. In this way, it may be that several hundred non-asylees enter the EU each year through Slovakia. This tracks with news reports from April-May 2009 concerning the arrests in Italy and Slovakia of a human-smuggling ring moving South Asians and North Africans through Slovakia into Italy. Several hundred people were thought to have been moved through Slovakia by the ring, which had several operatives working inside Slovak refugee centers.

¶13. (C) Comment. Our impression is that the Slovaks operate a tight border, at least from an immigration point of view, with Ukraine. Given the professionalism of the BAP, sophisticated technology, and the apparent rapid response of patrols, the Green Border (absent corruption) would not be the easiest way

into the EU. Still, we will urge the Slovaks to follow up on allegations of malfeasance with investigations and prosecutions, if appropriate. End Comment.

¶14. (U) This cable was cleared by DHS/ICE Vienna.

BALL